

ecological stability and people centered development through improvement in investment for conservation and development of forest resources.

(c) There has been an increase in the forest cover of the country by 3896 sq. km. i.e. from 6,33,397 sq. km. to 6,37,293 sq. km. during the period from 1995 to 1998.

Elephant Population

3859. SHRI K.C. KONDAIAH: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

- (a) what is the estimated elephant population in the country;
- (b) how many of them are in Karnataka;
- (c) whether Project Elephant is under implementation in States;
- (d) the names of States covered under the above project;
- (e) the amount released during 2000-2001 to such States for the implementation of Project Elephant;
- (f) the number of elephants died due to poaching in Karnataka; and
- (g) the steps taken to protect elephants in the country and in Karnataka?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) The estimated population of elephants in the country is about 28,000—29,000.

(b) According to the census conducted in 1997, the elephant population in Karnataka is around 6000.

(c) to (e) Project Elephant is being implemented in the States of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Uttaranchal, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. An amount of Rs. 636.852 lakh was released during 2000-01 to the aforesaid States for the implementation of Project Elephant.

(f) As informed by the State Government, 19 elephants died in Karnataka due to poaching during 2000-2001.

(g) Elephants have been included in schedule-I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 which prohibits their hunting. The Act was further amended in 1986 and 1991 to prohibit trade in ivory. Export of ivory from the country is also banned. A Centrally sponsored scheme "Project Elephant" was launched in February, 1992 to provide financial and technical assistance to the elephant bearing

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States for conservation of elephants and their habitats. Government of India has so far provided State Governments about Rs. 44 crore under this Project. Recently, the Central Government has also empowered the C.B.I, under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 to apprehend and prosecute the wildlife offenders. A Special Coordination and Enforcement Committee has been set up under the chairmanship of Secretary, Environment & Forests, Government of India, for control of poaching and illegal trade in wildlife. The matter relating to protection of wild animals was also discussed in the conference of the State Forest Ministers in Coimbatore in January, 2001 and the following recommendations for improving the existing protection system were made:

1. Lifting the ban on recruitment of forestry personnel and filling up the vacancies immediately.
2. Evolving effective mechanism for intelligence gathering and preventing wildlife crimes.
3. Training for the forest staff for undertaking investigation.
4. Designating special courts for trying wildlife offences.
5. Creation of effective enforcement infrastructure both within and outside protected areas to prevent poaching.

The Government of Karnataka in October, 2000 has also amended the Karnataka Forest Act, 1963 for providing greater powers to the forest officers for investigating wildlife offences. The State Government has also set up a forest cell in the Police Department headed by an Inspector General of Forests to help the Forest Department in dealing with forest offences.

Cadre review of Indian Forest Service

3860. SHRI KHAGEN DAS: Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

- (a) whether there is a system of cadre review of Indian Forest Service;
- (b) whether such a review is mandatory after a gap of five years; and